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A PERILOUS WOOING	<i>By Björnstjerne Björnson.</i>
A BREACH OF CONFIDENCE	<i>By Annie Armitt.</i>
WOKE UP AT LAST	<i>By Kate Lee.</i>
THE BUNDLE OF LETTERS	<i>By Moritz Jokai.</i>

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No. of Dist.	For this Competition the United Kingdom will be divided into 8 Districts as under:	The Prizes will be awarded every month during 1894, in each of the 8 Districts, as under:—	Value of Prizes given each month in each district.	Total value of Prizes in all the 8 districts during 1894
			£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1	IRELAND.	Every month, in each of the 8 districts, the 5 Competitors who send the largest number of Coupons from the district in which they reside, will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gent's "Premier" Safety Cycle, with Dunlop Pneumatic Tyres, value £20.	100 0 0	9600 0 0
2	SCOTLAND.	The next 20 Competitors will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gent's "Waltham" Stem-Winding Silver Lever Watch, value £4 4s.	84 0 0	8064 0 0
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4	NORTHUMBERLAND, DURHAM, and YORKSHIRE.	The next 300 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 3s. 6d.	52 10 0	5040 0 0
5	CUMBERLAND, WESTMORELAND, LANCASHIRE, and ISLE OF MAN.	The next 400 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 2s. 6d.	50 0 0	4800 0 0
6	WALES, CHESHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE, SHROPSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, and HEREFORDSHIRE.	The next 500 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 2s.	50 0 0	4800 0 0
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8	ESSEX, HERTFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, BERKSHIRE, SUSSEX, HAMPSHIRE, WILTSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, SOMERSETSHIRE, DORSETSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE, CORNWALL, ISLE OF WIGHT, and CHANNEL ISLANDS.			41904 0 0

RULES.

- The Competitions will close the last day of each month. Coupons received too late for one month's competition will be put into the next.
- Competitors who obtain wrappers from unsold soap in dealer's stock will be disqualified. Employees of Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, and their families, are debarred from competing.
- A printed list of Winners of Bicycles and Watches, and of Winning Numbers of Coupons for Books in Competitor's District will be forwarded 21 days after each competition closes, to those competitors who send Halfpenny Stamp for Postage, but in all cases where this is done, "Stamp enclosed" should be written on the form.
- Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, will award the prizes fairly to the best of their ability and judgment, but it is understood that all who compete agree to accept the award of Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, as final.

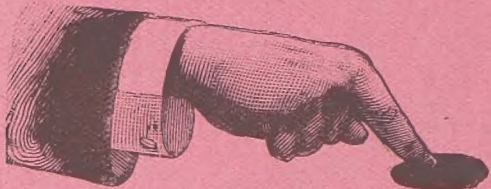
* The Bicycles are the celebrated Helical (Spiral) Tube "Premier" Cycles (Highest award, World's Fair, Chicago, 1893), manufactured by the "Premier" Cycle Company, Ltd., of Coventry and 14 Holborn Viaduct, London, fitted with Dunlop 1894 Pneumatic Tyres; Salisbury's "Invincible" Lamp; Lamplugh's 405 Saddle; Harrison's Gong; Tool Valve, Pump, &c.



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Illustrated Penny Tales.

A Perilous Wooing.

From the Norwegian of Bjørnstjerne Björnson.

[BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSEN, the first and greatest writer which Norway has produced, was born at Quiken, in North Norway, on the 8th of December, 1832, his father being a Lutheran country pastor. At an early age he began to write, and a two years' residence at Copenhagen, to which city he removed at twenty-four, and where he studied the chief Danish writers, confirmed him in his resolve to create a literature in Norway. He was only twenty-six when he assumed the directorship of the theatre at Bergen, where he produced play after play of national importance. He wrote also several novels, of which "Arne" and "In God's Way" are, perhaps, the best known to English readers. The following little story shows as well as any of his long romances his peculiar and original characteristics—his faithful yet poetic painting of the life and the wild scenery of the Norwegian Alps.]

FROM the time that Aslang was quite grown up there was no longer any peace or quiet at Husaby. In fact, all the handsomest young fellows in the village did nothing but fight and quarrel night after night; and it was always worst on Saturday nights. Aslang's father, old Canute Husaby, never went to bed on those nights without keeping on at least his leather breeches, and laying a good stout birch stick on the bed beside him. "If I have such a pretty daughter," said old Canute, "I must know how to take care of her."

Thor Nasset was only the son of a poor cottager, and yet folks said that it was he who went oftenest to visit the farmer's daughter at Husaby. Of course, old Canute was not pleased to hear this. He said it was not true; that, at any rate, he had never seen him there. Still, they smiled, and whispered to each other that if he only had thoroughly searched the hay-loft, whither Aslang had many an errand, he would have found Thor there.

Spring came, and Aslang went up the mountain with the cattle. And now, when the heat of the day hung over the valley, the rocks rose cool and clear through the sun's misty rays, the cow-bells tinkled, the shepherd's dog barked, Aslang sang her "jodel" songs, and blew the cow-horn, all the young men felt their hearts grow sore and heavy as they gazed upon her beauty. And on the first Saturday evening one after the other they crept up the hill. But they came down again quicker than they had gone up, for at the top stood a man, who kept guard, receiving each one who came up with such a warm reception that he all his life long remembered the words that accompanied the action: "Come up here again, and there will be still more in store for you!"

All the young fellows could arrive but at one conclusion: that there was only one man in the whole parish who had such fists, and that man was Thor Nasset. And

all the rich farmers' daughters thought it was too bad that this cottager's son should stand highest in Aslang Husaby's favour.

Old Canute thought the same when he heard about it all, and said that if there were no one else who could check him he would do it himself. Now, Canute was certainly getting on in years; still, although he was past sixty, he often enjoyed a good wrestling match with his eldest son whenever time indoors fell heavy on his hands.

There was but one path up to the mountain belonging to Husaby, and it went straight through the farm garden. Next Saturday evening, as Thor was on his way to the mountain, creeping carefully across the yard, hurrying as soon as he was well past the farm buildings—a man suddenly rushed at him.

"What do you want with me?" asked Thor, and hit him such a blow in the face that sparks danced before his eyes.

"You will soon learn that," said someone else behind him, and gave him a great blow in the back of his neck. That was Aslang's brother.



"WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?" ASKED THOR.





"HE ROWED AWAY ROUND THE POINT.

"And here's the third man," said old Canute, and attacked him also.

The greater the danger the greater was Thor's strength. He was supple as a willow, and hit out right manfully; he dived and he ducked; whenever a blow fell it missed him; and when none expected it he would deal a good one. He stooped down, he sprang on one side, but for all that he got a terrible thrashing. Old Canute said afterwards that "he had never fought with a braver fellow." They kept it up till blood began to flow, then Canute cried out: "Stop!" Then he added, in a croaking tone: "If you can get up here next Saturday, in spite of Canute Husaby and his men, the girl shall be yours!"

Thor dragged himself home as best he could, and when he reached the cottage went straight to bed. There was a great deal of talk about the fight up on Husaby Hill, but everyone said: "Why did he go there?" Only one person did not say so, and that was Aslang. She had been expecting Thor that Saturday evening, but when she heard what had happened between him and her father, she sat down and cried bitterly, and said to herself: "If I may not have Thor, I shall never have a happy day again in this world."

Thor stayed in his bed all Sunday, and when Monday came he felt he must stay on where he was. Tuesday came, and it was a very lovely day. It had rained in the night; the hills looked so fresh and green, the window was open, sweet odours were wafted in, the cow-bells were tinkling on the mountain, and far up above someone was "jodling." . . . Truly, if it had not been for his mother, who was sitting in the room, he could have cried. Wednesday came, and still he stayed in bed; on Thursday, though, he began to think about the possibility of being well again by Saturday, and Friday found him on his legs again. Then he thought of what Aslang's father had said: "If you can get up to her next Saturday without being stopped by Canute and his men, the girl shall be yours." Over and over again he looked up at Husaby Farm: "I shall never see another Christmas," thought Thor.

As before mentioned, there was but one path up to Husaby Hill; but surely any strong, able fellow must be able to get to it, even though the direct way were barred to him. For instance, if he were to row round the point yonder and fasten his boat at the one side, it might be possible to climb up there, although it was so very steep that the goats had great difficulty in climbing it, and they are not usually afraid of mountain work.

Saturday came, and Thor went out early in the morning. The day was most beautiful; the sun shone so brightly that the very bushes seemed alive. Up on the mountain many voices were "jodling," and there was much blowing of horns. When evening came he was sitting at his cottage door watching the steaming mist rise up on the hills. He looked upwards—all was quiet; he looked over towards Husaby Farm—and then he jumped into his boat and rowed away round the point.

Aslang sat before the hut; her day's work was done; she was thinking Thor would not come that evening, and that therefore many others might come instead,



"SHE LOOKED DOWN."

so she unfastened the dog and, without saying anything, walked farther on. She sat down so that she could see across the valley, but the mist was rising there and prevented her looking down. Then she chose another place, and without thinking more about it, sat down so that she looked towards the side where lay the fjord; it seemed to bring peace to her soul when she could gaze far away across the water.

As she sat there the fancy struck her that she was inclined to sing, so she chose a song with "long-drawn notes," and far and wide it sounded through the mountains. She liked to hear herself sing, so she began over again when the first verse was ended. But when she had sung the second, it seemed to her as though someone answered from far down below. "Dear me, what can that be?" thought Aslang. She stepped forward to the edge, and twined her arms round a slender birch which hung trembling over the precipice, and looked down. But she could see nothing; the fjord lay there calm and at rest; not a single bird skimmed the water. So Aslang sat herself down again, and again she began to sing. Once more came the answering voice in the same tones, and nearer than the first time. "That sound was no echo, whatever it may be," Aslang jumped to her feet and again leaned over the cliff. And there down below, at the foot of the rocky wall, she saw a boat fastened. It looked like a tiny nutshell, for it was very far down. She looked again and saw a fur cap, and under it the figure of a man, climbing up the steep and barren cliff.

"Who can it be?" Aslang asked herself; and, letting go the birch, she stepped back. She dared not answer her own question, but well she knew who it was. She flung herself down on the greensward, seized the grass with both hands as though it were she who dared not loose her hold for fear of falling. But the grass came up by the roots; she screamed aloud, and dug her hands deeper and deeper into the soil. She prayed to God to help him; but then it struck her that this feat of Thor's would be called "tempting Providence," and, therefore, he could not expect help from above.

"Only just this once!" she prayed. "Hear my prayer just this one time, and help him!" Then she threw her arms round the dog, as though it were Thor whom she was clasping, and rolled herself on the grass beside it.

The time seemed to her quite endless.

Suddenly the dog began to bark. "Bow, wow!" said he to Aslang, and jumped upon her. And again, "Wow, wow!" then over the edge of the cliff a coarse, round cap came to view, and—Thor was in her arms!

He lay there a whole minute, and neither of them was capable of uttering a syllable. And when they did begin to talk there was neither sense nor reason in anything they said.

But when old Canute Husaby heard of it he uttered a remark which had both sense and reason. Bringing his fist down on the table with a tremendous crash, "The lad deserves her," he cried; "the girl shall be his!"





I.

SHE sat with her pen in her hand, but she could not write. Her heart was full of a story that she had heard recently and could not forget: the story of a woman who had been happier than herself, and yet more miserable. She stared at the blank paper before her instead of writing, and she said to herself: "Why are all the chances in life given to those who are not fit to use them? If such a love had been mine once, I would never have let it go. There is no price that I would not have paid to keep it; and she—she threw it away for vanity!"

The story was very real to her, because she loved the man who had told it, and yet she had taken the telling of it to mean that the true history of his life was over, and that he had no love left to give again. The confidence he had reposed in her had been a compliment to her friendship, but a destruction of all her hopes of happiness. Before that confidence was made she had thought that his feeling for her was as deep as hers for him.

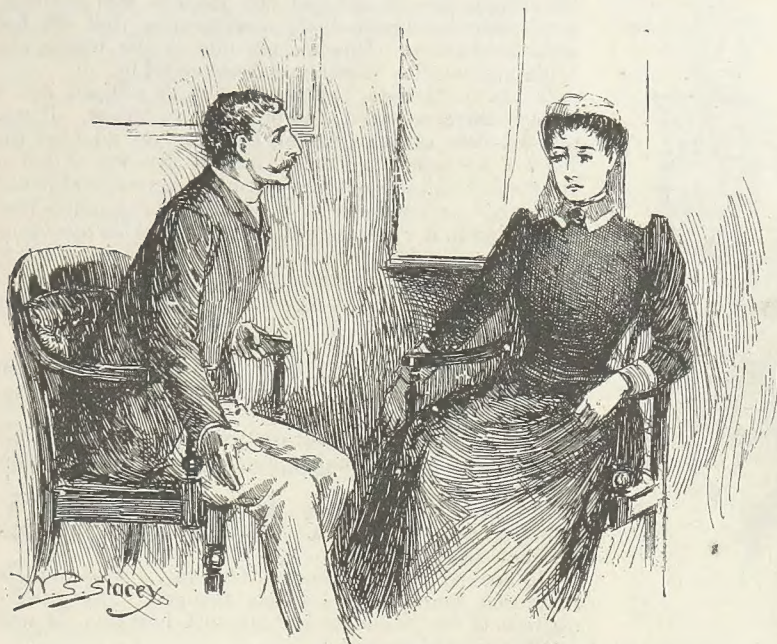
She had been married herself; but, though she had had a husband, she had never known a true love. Her marriage had been a sacrifice, made when she was very young, and when she acted almost entirely under the influence of a selfish mother. Her husband proved selfish, too, and—which was worse in her mother's eyes—not so prosperous as had been imagined. Eleanor's life had been a hard one always, and now she was left alone in the world, except for the little two-year-old baby. It was an ailing creature, fretful, and not pretty; but it was something to hold in her arms, if not enough to fill her heart. She loved it the more passionately perhaps for its infirmities; but sometimes the loneliness of her life overpowered her like a flood of bitter waters; she wanted some mind to speak to, some heart to answer hers, some tenderness to lean upon and trust. She was yet but very young, only twenty-two years old, and all the currents of life beat strongly within her; all the imperative demands for love, for praise, for happiness,

which make so large a part of our youth, were still alive in her heart, and would not easily be silenced.

Her income was insufficient for herself and her delicate child; she added to it in many little ways, as the opportunity was offered to her. She had written a few short stories for a particular magazine which could not afford to number famous authors among its contributors, and she had been paid for them. An accidental meeting with another occasional contributor had given her a friend; and Ralph Webster was at that time, perhaps, the only person with whom she was on terms of familiar friendship, and to whom she could talk on a moral and intellectual level. His sympathies and aspirations were not unlike her own; they always understood one another at least, even when they did not agree. To talk to him was, therefore, the opening of a new experience to her. Language had before—at least, spoken language—been only a vehicle for the management of affairs, the expression of desires, the receipt of information. Now it served to exchange thought, to bring two lives into close mental relation with one another, to console, to suggest, to sustain. And she had thought he loved her. He was a little more prosperous in the world than herself, and he did not guess that she was so very poor; but he was not rich enough to make her feel that she would take much more than she gave if she became his wife. They would work together, as they lived together, and loved together. She had thought, with others—

Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work;
And both commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers and true lovers born.

And then he had received an appointment to travel as special correspondent to a great paper, and he had come to say good-bye to her, and before saying good-bye had told her this story. She had taken it for a final farewell. Since his going, three days before, she had thought of nothing else. She had work to do, but she could not do it. How could she throw herself into dream-loves and dream-troubles with this pain of loss



"HE TOLD HER THIS STORY."

and loneliness at her heart? And yet the work was necessary, and she dared not delay it longer than that night.

She had, the day before, received back from her editor a story which she had hoped he would accept, with the intimation that if she would write him one half as long, to be ready in two days, he would almost certainly take it, as he wished to fill up a corresponding gap in the next number of his magazine.

She urgently needed the money. Her baby, little Lorna, was paler and thinner even than usual; the doctor whom she consulted said that the child needed country air. She had hoped to earn enough money to take it away for some weeks to a farmhouse, when she sent that story to the editor of the magazine. She must not lose the opportunity which he had offered in its place. She had thought of a plot—a foolish little, commonplace affair—but she could not breathe any life into it. When she forced her thoughts into the necessary channel they flowed back again to another story. She saw Ralph Webster standing before her; she heard his voice again, telling her the simple tragedy of his life. How graphically he had told it, though not with many words! She could fill in the details for herself. It was a story of true and patient love, and of shameful faithlessness and falsehood; a story in which the wrong-doer pitied herself and fancied herself a victim, while she accepted her husband's sacrifice and spoilt his life. She had been cruel to him with the cruelty which demands everything, and gives less than nothing in return.

"And yet," said Ralph, when he told the story—he had never related it to anyone before—"I never ceased to love her while she lived; and when she died the world seemed empty to me. I suppose it was only this, that I could never take back what I had once given."

There was not much in the story itself, but it held Eleanor's thoughts fast, and would not let them go: because the love that had been so scorned and wasted would have made the happiness of her life. She must write her tale, but how? She could not cast into its foolish incidents the burning thoughts that possessed her; these were all woven about another thread. And while she still thought, her child cried, and she had to leave her work to soothe it. She lay down on the bed beside it, and fell asleep. She awoke in the dead of the night. The anxious thought which watches ever beside the pillow of the unhappy leaped at once to its place in

her mind, giving her no respite. "You must write your story," it said. She got up with the resolution of despair, and went back to the table. "I will write *this*," she said, "and have done with it."

There was no difficulty now. The facts in her mind ranged themselves instantly into dramatic shape; living words, words that throbbed with her own love, and pain, and regret, and longing, shaped themselves into eager thought.

When vain desire at last and vain regret
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain.

That was the burden of the writing, and it was a very old one; but it seemed new now, because she wrote it with all her heart. When dawn broke she had eased herself of the phantom that had haunted her, and was free. How strange it is, this relief that comes to some of us after we have put into words the thoughts that torment us! She was free now, and she wrote the other story—her tale for the magazine; but she knew that it was a miserable affair.

Lorna was worse that morning. Her mother took her into her arms and looked into her suffering face.

"If I keep her here she will leave me too," she said to herself. "I shall have nothing left."

She wrapped up her manuscript and took it herself to the editor. She wanted to bring his answer back. He was, in fact, waiting for the story to go on printing, and he was willing to look at it at once. She sat and watched him as he did so, with very little hope in her face. He read it carefully at first, then he turned over the pages rapidly, and finally put the manuscript down.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but it won't do. It isn't up to your usual level. I would make it do if I could, but—it isn't possible."

"I knew," she said, "it wouldn't."

He looked at her in surprise, for she was unfolding another roll of manuscript.

"If you will look at this," she said, "you won't say the same."

He took the paper and began to read casually; then he became interested. He read to the end without speaking; when he had finished he rang the bell and gave the manuscript to the young man who answered his summons. "This can go to press at once," he said, "you have had the necessary directions already."

Eleanor half rose to her feet, and then sat down again. She did not utter a word.

"You have never done anything so good," said the editor; "it is an unpleasant subject, but you have treated it cleverly, very cleverly."

"I shall never do anything so good again," was her strange answer. "I knew you would take it. Would you mind paying me for it *now*? For I must go into the country to-morrow."

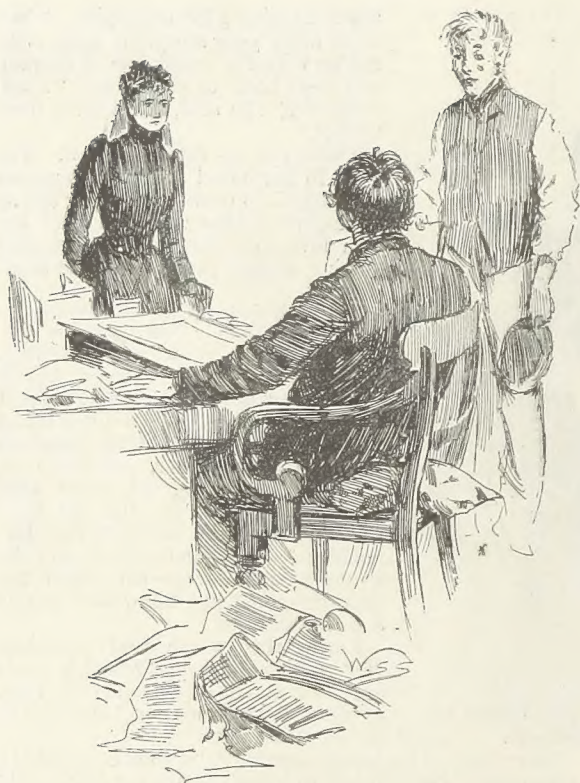
He gave her the cheque she asked for, and she took Lorna away next day.

A month after she saw Ralph Webster again. He had returned unexpectedly, and he sought her out at South-sea, where she was living with her baby. But they did not meet as friends; she saw him with a shock of surprise, and he looked at her as she had never seen him look before.

"Mrs. Wakefield," he said, "I have no right to follow you here, but I came to ask you a single question."

She understood the situation at once, and was ready. "I will answer any question that you like to ask," she said.

He had a magazine in his fingers, and he opened it at a page that she well knew. Were not the title letters of it, the whole aspect of it, burnt into her brain? They were part of the crime that she felt she had committed.



"THIS CAN GO TO PRESS AT ONCE."

"There is a story here," he said, "that occupies a very prominent place. It is called 'Hand in Hand to Death.' I think that you wrote it?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, in a low voice; "I wrote it."

"There is no one in the world, except you and myself, who knows the whole of that story. I told it to you because I intended, the next time I saw you, to ask you to be my wife. I wanted you to have time to think of it first. You might not have liked me so well after knowing it."

She folded her child closer in her arms, and bent over it, that he might not see her face.

"I need not speak to you of such a subject now. I know how much you value my esteem—my confidence. You have sold my trouble to the world. I suppose you sold it?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, in a still, strange voice; "I was paid eight pounds for it." She was remembering that she had changed the first sovereign to purchase her railway ticket, and that she had calculated how many weeks it would keep her in the country.

"I knew that a woman I loved might despise me," said Ralph; "but I could not guess that a woman I trusted would betray me—for money."

She did not answer him anything. There was that in his tone which made her not care to defend herself. She had injured him in a deadly and cruel manner. Let him say to her what he would. But he said no more: he lifted his hat and went.

II.

A YEAR after that found Ralph Webster a successful man. He had written a novel that hit the public taste; it was full of bitterness and scoffing; but the public liked such bitterness and scoffing, and bought the book.

He wondered sometimes what had become of Eleanor Wakefield. There was no trace of her in her old lodgings, and the editor told him that she had sent him no more contributions. She had seemed to Ralph a noble woman, a woman whom he might love on an equal footing, with all trust and reverence, without pity or forbearance. And she had failed him strangely and meanly, so that

the sting of her offence had not yet left him entirely; but it troubled him a little to remember that she had made no defence. This had put him in the wrong, and made him wonder what her defence could be.

It was in the dusk of evening that he stepped into a railway carriage, which had only one occupant. It was a third-class carriage, for he had not yet adopted the ways of a prosperous man. The lady who was seated at the farther end did not move at his entrance, and it was only when he had been in his place some minutes that something in her intense stillness attracted his attention. She had desired him to forget her presence, or not to notice it, but the effort defeated itself, and his first half-curious, half-unconscious glance at her made him rise and cross to her side.

"Mrs. Wakefield!" he said.

"Yes," she answered, "it is Mrs. Wakefield." Then she added, quietly, "I should like, if I may, to congratulate you on your great success."

"You may spare me your congratulations. My success is built on my great unhappiness. None should know that better than you."

"Is it not so with many people?" she asked, gently, ignoring his last remark. "But some are unhappy without success."

He looked at her more attentively. She was in mourning, and she was much changed. The passive attitude of her hands on her lap told him this, as well as the tone of her voice.

"You never followed up *your* success," he remarked.

"Mr. Blakely told me that he expected great things of you."

She answered him nothing.

"Mrs. Wakefield," he went on, vaguely hurt by her silence, which tormented him with an impression of his own cruelty, "I want to apologize to you for what I said when we last met. It was too much."

"It was not too much. I have said more to myself before and since. And yet," she said, turning her eyes full upon him, "I do not ask you to forgive me, because I do not repent. I would do it again if the past came back to me. It is right that you should know how evil I am. I do not repent. I would do it again. Yet I hate myself for doing it. Besides," she added, in a lower tone, which she could hardly have meant him to hear, "it spoils my happiness as well as yours."

"I do not understand," he said.

"Why should you understand?" she answered. "It does not matter."

The train was whirling on in the darkness. The noise



"YES," SAID ELEANOR, IN A LOW VOICE, "I WROTE IT."

of its rush, the flashing of lights in the city they were leaving, seemed to increase the solitude of these two, who were so near, yet so far apart; so much akin in spirit, and so hopelessly estranged.

"If it had been for fame," he said, "I could have understood the temptation better. It would have been a higher sort of temptation. But you did not even sign the story, and you have not republished it."

"I hoped," she said, "that it would be little read and soon forgotten. You had gone away for a long time. I thought that you would never see it. And no one else could ever guess where I got it from."

"You made it very clever," he replied. "I wonder, having gone so far, that you go no farther."

"I shall never write again," she answered. "I have no motive. And what I did write has cost me too much."

He did not understand her; he had not known of her past poverty, nor of her recent loss. But he went on to say: "When I look at you, it seems impossible to believe that you did such a thing without a reason. It may have seemed a little thing to you, but it was so much to me."

"I knew how much," she answered; "I knew all the meanness of what I did, the treachery of it, and that it would hurt you if you knew, but I thought that you would never know."

"And you did not love me," he added; but he was watching her keenly as he spoke.

Her eyes flashed upon him for a moment. "Oh," she said, "it was *because* I loved you that I could not help doing it. If I could have escaped from the memory of what you told me, and have thought of other things instead, it would never have been written. If only I could have forgotten you!"

He was startled and astonished. He caught her hands and then let them go again.

"I wish I could believe you," he said.

"You need not. Why should you?" she answered. "I have nothing left to give you. What is a love worth that helped me to betray you?"

"And are you still *glad* you did it?" He had taken her hands firmly now, that he might look into her eyes.

There was no tenderness there, only a desperate, heart-broken defiance.

"Am I glad of anything? Can I ever be glad of anything any more? It is only that I would do it again for the same reason. And yet I did not get the thing for which I paid such a heavy price."

"Will you tell me what the thing was?"

"It was only," she answered, "that I thought that treachery the price of my baby's life—and now my baby is dead."

She drew her hands away from his as she spoke. There had come into her eyes a grief that awed and restrained him. He could see that it had nothing to do with himself. Her tone was very quiet. It seemed to leave him at a great distance from her. For a moment he felt that he had got his answer, and could speak of love to her no more in the presence of such a sorrow. Then his courage came back, and with it resolution. If he was sure enough of his own love for her, he could not fail in the end to drive away both her sorrow and her remorse.

"I have been cruel to you," he said; "can you forgive me?"

"I?" she answered, tremulously; "how can I forgive you?"

"Because I have been a fool, and quarrelled with my own happiness." And then he added, speaking slowly, "The story was a part of your own life. You had a right to do what you wished with it. At least, you can make it a part of your life if you will be more generous to me than I was to you."

She let him take her hands again. She looked into his eyes searchingly. What she saw there seemed to satisfy her, for she answered, irrelevantly, "Oh, I have been so lonely. To live in the world with nothing but myself and your contempt! You cannot guess what it was like."

"Will you live in the world with me and my love, and see if you like it better?"

She had been too long without happiness to fight against it now, and her answer ended his trouble and hers.



Woke Up at Last.



THE VISION OF ST. HELENA. BY PAULO VERONESE.
(In the National Gallery.)

"THERE'S room for you too, Nellie!" said Ralphie, in his sweet, feeble voice. So Nellie curled herself up beside him in the capacious old leather-covered arm-chair which always stood beside the parlour fire.

There was a splendid fire flaming in the grate, so the children did not mind being alone in the on-coming darkness. They were quite happy, nestling together in the big chair, with the firelight playing on their faces and flickering all over the room. The changeful golden glow and the strange leaping shadows brought beauty and mystery into Mrs. Clarke's barely-furnished little parlour.

Mrs. Clarke herself had gone out to do some market-

ing. She had been a long time gone, and in their secret hearts the children hoped it would be a long while yet before she returned. Poor Mrs. Clarke, soft-hearted as a baby, but worried and troubled about many things, was often rather cross and disagreeable. Since Mr. Clarke's death four years ago she had been a lodging house keeper, and lodging-house keeping had spoiled her temper, and brought anxious puckers and wrinkles to her once smooth forehead. But the fact that she had adopted little orphaned Ralphie was proof enough of her being at heart a thoroughly kind and womanly woman.

This was the sad history, so far as Mrs. Clarke knew

it, of Ralphie's parentage. Seven years ago, when Mr. Clarke was alive and when Mrs. Clarke only let out two top rooms of her house, there came one day a gentleman seeking lodgings for himself, his wife, and baby. Mrs. Clarke knew he was a gentleman, although he was shabbily dressed, and could not afford to pay much for



"THE FIRELIGHT SHONE ON THE TWO LITTLE FACES."

the rooms. He was an artist, he said, and his face was so sad, gentle, and winning that Mrs. Clarke needed no other recommendation, and even let him have the rooms for much less than she had originally asked. No one knew better than Mrs. Clarke the heartrending struggles with ill-fortune and poverty her lodgers went through, and no one was sadder than Mrs. Clarke when the young artist laid down his brush for the last time, and took to his bed and died. And when, not many months later, the young artist's girl-wife, broken-hearted, followed her husband into the unseen world, it was Mrs. Clarke who took compassion on the sickly, wailing baby boy, and brought him up side by side with her own little daughter Nellie.

As the firelight shone on the two little faces it was easy to see that the children were not brother and sister. Ralphie's face was delicately pretty, with white arched brow and sensitive blue eyes; Nellie's was plain, plump, and happy-looking. They had been sitting silent for a long time. Nellie was half asleep, her dark head, with the straight hair cut short all round it, lying against Ralphie's curls of silky gold. Ralphie's dreaming, dilating eyes were fixed upon the clear flaming fire.

"Nellie!" said Ralphie, suddenly, "I should think that lady in the picture woke up!"

"What lady, Ralphie?" said Nellie, opening wide her sleepy, brown eyes.

"The lady that's asleep, and that the angel boys are flying down to with a cross," said Ralphie.

"That picture in the big gallery that you're so fond of?" said Nellie, suddenly comprehending.

"Yes," answered Ralphie, and went on dreamily.

"Pr'aps these angels are her own little boys that died one day and went to Heaven. And one day they wanted to go back to see their mother. So Jesus let them fly down on His cross. But they found their mother fast asleep, she was so tired out with crying because her little boys had died. That's what the picture shows you. I

spect she woke up soon, and saw her little boys that had been turned into angels. The picture doesn't show you that, but I should think Jesus didn't let them go back to Heaven without letting their mother wake up and see them."

This was Ralphie's interpretation of the picture of the vision of St. Helena which hangs in the National Gallery. Mrs. Clarke's house was in a small street scarcely a quarter of an hour's walk from Trafalgar Square, so Ralphie and Nellie often wandered to the "big gallery," as they called it, and spent many happy hours there, gazing and marvelling at the pictures. To Ralphie the pictures were of absorbing and entrancing interest, and many an odd, quaint fancy about them was lodged in his busy brain. The child had inherited his father's impressionable, imaginative artist nature.

"How glad she must have been," went on Ralphie, "when she woke up and saw——"

Ralphie stopped. Mrs. Clarke had come home, heavily laden with parcels, very tired, and consequently very cross, so although they were very quiet and could not possibly have been in the way, snuggled up as they were in the arm-chair, Ralphie and Nellie were immediately dispatched to bed. They were able, however, to finish their talk about the picture while they undressed. Nellie shared her mother's bed, and Ralphie slept in a closet close by. They always left their doors open, and talked while they got into bed, and sometimes for a long time after. To-night Ralphie would have continued to talk about the lady in the picture long after he and Nellie had nestled down in bed, but Nellie was tired, and fell asleep as soon as her little head touched the pillow.

Ralphie had a bad night. Sometimes he was burning hot, sometimes shivering with cold. He tossed about and muttered to himself, and it was very late before he fell asleep. In the morning, when he awoke, there was a strange excitement in his eyes. He lay still a little while, his brain working strangely. Then he slipped out of bed, and went to Nellie's bedside. Mrs. Clarke had been up for some time, but little Nellie was still sleeping. A good shake soon aroused her.

"Nellie!" cried Ralphie, excitedly, "the lady in the picture woke up! She woke up and spoke to me!"



"MRS. CLARKE HAD COME HOME VERY TIRED."

Nellie, let's go and see if it'll come true! She opened her eyes and spoke to me! Let's go and see if it'll come true!"

He had much ado to make the bewildered Nellie understand what he wanted her to do—to get up there and then, and go with him to the National Gallery to see if the sleeping lady in the picture was awake! When Nellie did at last comprehend what was required of her she made no demur. She was accustomed to follow and obey Ralphie in everything, and was easily carried away by his excitement and eagerness.

The two children dressed and went quietly downstairs. Mrs. Clarke was busy in the kitchen, so they slipped out of the front door unobserved. Ralphie was weak and dizzy, but his excitement gave him strength, and he started off at a quick patter down the street, almost dragging Nellie with him. All the way he babbled strangely about the lady in the picture, and what she had said to him in his dream.

When they reached the Gallery, Ralphie found, to his keen disappointment, that the doors were not yet open. He had quite overlooked the fact that they did not open till ten o'clock. The clock of St. Martin's showed that it was now half-past eight.

It never occurred to Ralphie to go back, and the two children sat down in the porch to wait an hour and a half.

Ralphie's eyes, fixed with an intent look upon vacancy, grew ever more and more brilliant. Nellie, who had had no beautiful, strange dream to make her forget everything else, began to feel cold and hungry. She listlessly drooped her little round head against a stone pillar, and wondered if Ralphie would really wait there till ten o'clock.

Big Ben struck the hour of nine, and St. Martin's chimed in a moment later.

Nellie was fast asleep. Ralphie sat in a waking dream with wide, unblinking eyes.



"NELLIE WAS FAST ASLEEP."

The hour passed, and Big Ben and St. Martin's proclaimed that it was ten o'clock.

The doors opened. Ralphie roused Nellie. They slipped in, and stole quickly up one of the stone flights of stairs.

Without a glance of recognition, Ralphie hurried past all his favourite pictures—the Madonnas and baby Christs; the man pierced with cruel arrows; the angel heads emerging from clouds; the lady with the wheel, her face upturned to Heaven, and her beautiful dress of

ruby and yellow, grey and green; the boy with the bushy hair and flying blue cloak running arm in arm with an angel, and with a fish dangling from one hand—all these he almost ran past, never pausing until he reached the sleeping lady.

That sweet, weary, calm face of St. Helena, resting on her hand, had taken a great hold on Ralphie's heart. As he and Nellie stopped before the picture now, he clasped his hands together, and fixed his glittering blue eyes on St. Helena's face.

St. Helena was fast asleep.

"Won't you wake up, lady?" Ralphie began to whisper wistfully. "Won't you—?" The little limbs trembled and failed, a strange, giddy feeling came into the poor little head, everything grew black, and Ralphie slid to the ground in a swoon.

Nellie screamed in terror, and threw herself down beside him. It filled her with an awful dread to see him lying so motionless and white. Frantically she pulled him by the hand, but he did not stir. She implored him to open his eyes, but he kept them closed. Nellie sobbed in an agony of fear and desolation.

St. Helena slept on. Neither Ralphie's wistful appeal nor Nellie's wild sobs had pierced through her dreams.

But help was coming.

Olivia Ross had been out an hour ago on an errand of mercy. She was now walking slowly back to her lonely home, pondering over the sad scene she had just quitted, marvelling at the strange dealings of God with men.

Something in the pathetic story she had just listened to had reminded her of the fate of her young brother Ralph. Ten years ago Ralph, a dreamy, unpractical, talented boy, had turned his back on his home and on his wrathful, disappointed father, to live by the Art his father despised and to make himself a name in the world as a painter. Since then there had been no word or sign from him. The wide world had engulfed him.

Olivia Ross was a sweet and tender-hearted woman.

About her compassionate lips and on her serene brow there were traces of outlived sorrow. She had had much grief since Ralph, the brother she had loved so well, had gone away. The proud old father had died, not forgiving his son even at the last, and then Olivia, unable to live in the sorrow-haunted home, had left it, to come to London, there to expend her wealth and her compassion wherever she found need for it.

Her way this morning lay through Trafalgar Square. As she reached the National Gallery, some strong impulse made her turn and enter. She used to say afterwards that an angel must have taken her by the hand and led her in. The galleries seemed to be quite empty. She walked slowly from one room to another, stopping now and then to glance at a picture, but always drawn irresistibly on again.

Suddenly a child's terrified scream, breaking the stillness of the place, startled her. She hastened in the direction from which the sound had come, and was soon on the spot where Ralphie lay unconscious on the floor, Nellie crouched beside him.

"My poor little ones!" cried Olivia Ross, and in a moment she was lifting the prostrate child into her pitying arms.

Ralphie stirred and opened his eyes.

What a radiant smile it was that stole into his face as he looked up at the lady in whose arms he lay! It was as if some celestial vision had been granted him.

"You have woke up at last!" he whispered. "Woke up at last!" There was a cadence of perfect content in the feeble little voice, and for a moment the blue eyes shone out from the pallor of the child's face with a wonderful lustre and beauty.

Olivia started. It was not Ralphie's words, but his beautiful eyes, that awoke a strange agitation within her.



"RALPHIE LAY UNCONSCIOUS ON THE FLOOR."

"How like! How like!" she exclaimed, wonderingly to herself, as she scanned the lines of Ralphie's face.

But this was no time for wonder and wild speculation. The exhausted condition of the little fellow demanded immediate relief. Learning from Nellie, who clung sobbing to her skirts, that the children's home was farther away than her own, she did not pause long to consider what she should do. Nellie was sent home to tell the story to her mother, and in a brief time Ralphie was under Olivia Ross's roof with a doctor beside him.

Ralphie was very ill, said the doctor, but with extreme care there was hope of his recovery.

He had always kept but a frail hold on life, and now he had a hard struggle not to let go of it altogether. He lay in a state of semi-consciousness. Now and then he opened his eyes, and always that seraphic smile came into them when he saw the pitiful face of Olivia Ross bending over him. And Olivia smiled back at him, because she saw that it satisfied the child, but her heart was full of tears, and she yearned strangely towards him.

When Mrs. Clarke came, and when Olivia heard the story of Ralphie's parents, her heart nearly broke with mingled joy and pain. There was no doubt that little

Ralphie, to whose help she had been so wonderfully guided, was her own nephew, Ralph's child.

Ralphie did not die: Olivia could not let him die. She watched over him with tireless, ceaseless care, keeping hungry death at bay.

"You have woke up at last! Woke up at last!" Ralphie would murmur, again and again.

And Olivia, because it soothed him, would answer softly, as she stroked his brow with a tender hand:—

"Yes, I have woke up at last, little Ralph; I have woke up at last!"

To herself, thinking of her young brother's thwarted aspirations and unhappy fate, Olivia cried, passionately:—

"If he lives—and he must live—I will give him

all that was denied to poor Ralph. If he loves Art as Ralph loved it, he shall have sympathy without stint. He shall study, and have the best of teachers. He shall travel, and see all that is best in Art in the world. He shall have every opportunity of developing his talent. He shall be a great painter if it is in him to be one."

When Ralphie was at last free from his delusion, and was able to be told that the lady who had nursed him so pitifully and so lovingly through his illness was his own aunt, his wonder and rapture knew no bounds. It seemed strange at first to hear that he was never to go back to live with Nellie and Mrs. Clarke, and it was hard to part from them. But he was soon reconciled to the change. How could he help it, when it was so beautiful and happy a one? How could he help liking to be loved and cared for by so sweet and noble a lady as his aunt Olivia?

It need scarcely be added that Nellie and Mrs. Clarke were never forgotten, not even when little Ralphie had grown to man's estate, and had become a promising young painter, of whom it was confidently predicted that he would some day write R.A. after his name.



"YOU HAVE WOKE UP AT LAST."

The Bundle of Letters.

From the Hungarian of Moritz Jokai.

ONE of the celebrated medical practitioners of Pesth, Dr. K—, was one morning, at an early hour, obliged to receive a very pressing visitor. The man, who was waiting in the ante-room, sent in word by the footman that all delay would be dangerous to him; he had, therefore, to be received immediately.

The doctor hastily wrapped a dressing-gown about him, and directed the patient to be admitted to him.

He found himself in the presence of a man who was a complete stranger to him, but who appeared to belong to the best society, judging from his manners. On his pale face could be discerned traces of great physical and mental sufferings. He carried his right hand in a sling, and though he tried to restrain himself, he now and then could not prevent a stifled sigh escaping from his lips.

"You are Dr. K—?"

he asked, in a low and feeble tone of voice.

"That is my name, sir."

"Living in the country, I have not the honour of knowing you, except by reputation. But I cannot say that I am delighted to make your acquaintance, because my visit to you is not a very agreeable one."

Seeing that the sufferer's legs were hardly able to sustain him, the doctor invited him to be seated.

"I am fatigued. It is a week since I had any sleep. Something is the matter with my right hand; I don't know what it is—whether it is a carbuncle, or cancer. At first the pain was slight, but now it is a continuous horrible burning, increasing from day to day. I could bear it no longer, so threw myself into my carriage and came to you, to beg you to cut out the affected spot, for an hour more of this torture will drive me mad."

The doctor tried to reassure him, by saying that he might be able to cure the pain with dissolvents and ointments, without resorting to the use of the bistoury.

"No, no, sir!" cried the patient; "no plasters or ointments can give me any relief. I must have the knife. I have come to you to cut out the place which causes me so much suffering."

The doctor asked to see the hand, which the patient held out to him, grinding his teeth, so insufferable appeared to be the pain he was enduring, and with all imaginable precaution he unwound the bandages in which it was enveloped.

"Above all, doctor, I beg of you not to hesitate on account of anything you may see. My disorder is so strange; that you will be surprised; but do not let that weigh with you."

Doctor K— reassured the stranger. As a doctor in practice, he was used to see everything, and there was nothing that could surprise him.

What he saw when the hand was freed from its bandages stupefied him, nevertheless. Nothing abnormal was to be seen in it—neither wound nor graze; it was a hand like any other. Bewildered, he let it fall from his own.

A cry of pain escaped from the stranger, who raised the afflicted member with his left hand, showing the doctor that he had not come with the intention of mystifying him, and that he was really suffering.

"Where is the sensitive spot?"

"Here, sir," said the stranger, indicating on the back of his hand a point where two large veins crossed, his whole frame trembling when the doctor lightly touched it with the tip of his finger.

"It is here that the burning pain makes itself felt?"

"Abominably!"

"Do you feel the pressure when I place my finger on it?"

The man made no reply, but his eyes filled with tears, so acute was his suffering.

"It is surprising! I can see nothing at that place."

"Nor can I; yet what I feel there is so terrible that at times I am almost driven to dash my head against the wall."

The doctor examined the spot with a magnifying-glass, then shook his head.

"The skin is full of life; the blood within it circulates regularly; there is neither inflammation nor cancer under it; it is as healthy at that spot as elsewhere."

"Yet I think it is a little redder there."

"Where?"

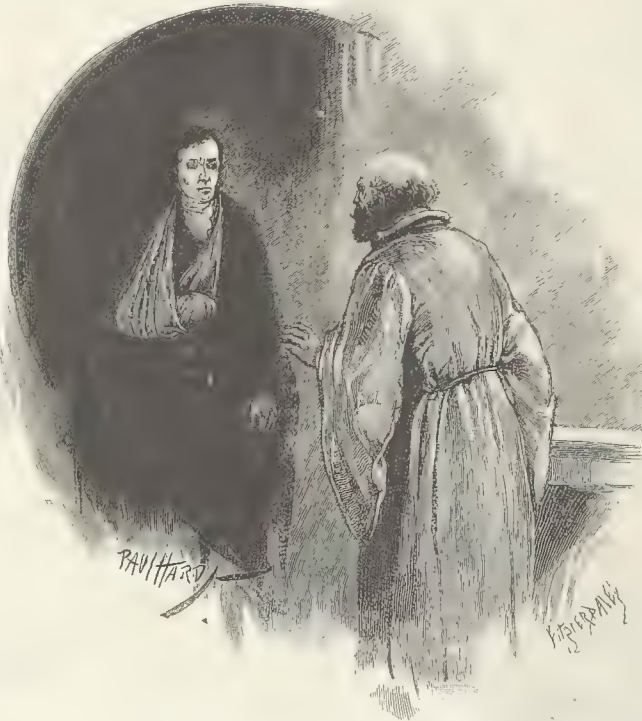
The stranger took a pencil from his pocket-book and traced on his hand a ring about the size of a sixpenny-piece, and said:—

"It is there."

The doctor looked in his face; he was beginning to believe that his patient's mind was unhinged.

"Remain here," he said, "and in a few days I'll cure you."

"I cannot wait. Don't think that I am a madman, a



"HE CARRIED HIS RIGHT HAND IN A SLING."

maniac ; it is not in that way that you would cure me. The little circle which I have marked with my pencil causes me internal tortures, and I have come to you to cut it away."

"That I cannot do," said the doctor.

"Why?"

"Because your hand exhibits no pathological disorder. I see at the spot you have indicated nothing more amiss than on my own hand."

"You really seem to think that I have gone out of my senses, or that I have come here to mock you," said the stranger, taking from his pocket-book a bank-note for a thousand florins, and laying it on the table. "Now, sir, you see that I am not playing off any childish jest, and that the service I seek of you is as urgent as it is important. I beg you to remove this part of my hand."

"I repeat, sir, that for all the treasures in the world you cannot make me regard as unsound a member that is perfectly sound, and still less induce me to cut it with my instruments."

"And why not?"

"Because such an act would cast a doubt upon my medical knowledge and compromise my reputation. Everybody would say that you were mad ; that I was dishonest in taking advantage of your condition, or ignorant in not perceiving it."

"Very well. I will only ask a small service of you, then. I am myself capable of making the incision. I shall do it rather clumsily with my left hand ; but that does not matter. Be good enough only to bind up the wound after the operation."

It was with astonishment that the doctor saw that this strange man was speaking seriously. He stripped off his coat, turned up the wristbands of his shirt, and took a bistoury in his left hand.



"HE TOOK A BISTOURY IN HIS LEFT HAND."

A second later, and the steel had made a deep incision in the skin.

"Stay!" cried the doctor, who feared that his patient might, through his awkwardness, sever some important organ. "Since you have determined on the operation, let me perform it."

He took the bistoury, and placing in his left hand the right hand of the patient, begged him to turn away his face, the sight of blood being insupportable to many persons.

"Quite needless. On the contrary, it is I who must direct you where to cut."

In fact, he watched the operation to the end with the greatest coolness, indicating the limits of the incisions. The open hand did not even quiver in that of the doctor, and when the circular piece was removed, he sighed profoundly, like a man experiencing an enormous relief.

"Nothing burns you now?"

"All has ceased," said the stranger, smiling. "The pain has completely disappeared, as if it had been carried away with the part excised. The little discomfort which the flowing of blood causes me, compared with the other pain, is like a fresh breeze after a blast from the infernal regions. It does me a real good to see my blood pouring forth : let it flow, it does me extreme good."

The stranger watched with an expression of delight the blood pouring from the wound, and the doctor was obliged to insist on binding up the hand.

During the bandaging the aspect of his face completely changed. It no longer bore a dolorous expression, but a look full of good humour was turned upon the doctor. No more contraction of the features, no more despair. A taste for life had returned ; the brow was once again calmed ; the colour found its way back to the cheeks. The entire man exhibited a complete transformation.

As soon as his hand was laid in the sling he warmly wrung the doctor's hand with the one that remained free, and said, cordially :—

"Accept my sincere thanks. You have positively cured me. The trifling remuneration I offer you is not at all proportioned to the service you have rendered me : for the rest of my life I shall search for the means of repaying my debt to you."

The doctor would not listen to anything of the kind, and refused to accept the thousand florins placed on the table. On his side, the stranger refused to take them back, and, observing that the doctor was losing his temper, begged him to make a present of the money to some hospital, and prepared to take his departure.

K— induced his patient to remain at his house until the wound in his hand should be cicatrized, which it did without the least accident. During this time the doctor was able to satisfy himself that he had to do with a man of extensive knowledge, reflective, and having very positive opinions in regard to the affairs of life. Besides being rich, he occupied an important official position. Since the taking away of his invisible pain, no trace of mental or physical malady was discoverable in him.

The cure completed, the man returned tranquilly to his residence in the country.

About three weeks had passed when, one morning, at an hour as unduly as before, the servant again announced the strange patient.

The stranger, whom K— hastened to receive, entered the room with his right hand in a sling, his features convulsed and hardly recognisable from suffering. Without waiting to be invited to sit down, he sank into a chair, and, being unable to master the torture he was enduring, groaned, and without uttering a word held out his hand to the doctor.

"What has happened?" asked K—, stupefied.

"We have not cut deep enough," replied the stranger, sadly, and in a fainting voice. "It burns me more cruelly than before. I am worn out by it ; my arm is stiffened by it. I did not wish to trouble you a second time, and have borne it, hoping that by degrees the invisible inflammation would either mount to my head or descend to my heart, and put an end to my miserable existence ; but it has not done so. The pain never goes beyond the spot, but it is indescribable ! Look at my face, and you will be able to imagine what it must be !"

The colour of the man's skin was that of wax, and a cold perspiration beaded his forehead. The doctor unbound the bandaged hand. The point operated on was well healed; a new skin had formed, and nothing extraordinary was to be seen. The sufferer's pulse beat quickly, without feverishness, while yet he trembled in every limb.

"This really smacks of the marvellous!" exclaimed the doctor, more and more astonished. "I have never before seen such a case."

"It is a prodigy, a horrible prodigy, doctor. Do not try to find a cause for it, but deliver me from this torment. Take your knife and cut deeper and wider: only that can relieve me."

The doctor was obliged to give in to the prayers of his patient. He performed the operation once again, cutting into the flesh more deeply; and, once more, he saw in the sufferer's face the expression of astonishing relief, the curiosity at seeing the blood flow from the wound, which he had observed on the first occasion.

When the hand was dressed, the deadly pallor passed from the face, the colour returned to the cheeks; but the patient no more smiled. This time he thanked the doctor sadly.

"I thank you, doctor," he said. "The pain has once more left me. In a few days the wound will heal. Do not be astonished, however, to see me return before a month has passed."

"Oh! my dear sir, drive this idea from your mind."

The doctor mentioned this strange case to several of his colleagues, who each held a different opinion in regard to it, without any of them being able to furnish a plausible explanation of its nature.

As the end of the month approached, K — awaited with anxiety the reappearance of this enigmatic personage. But the month passed and he did not reappear.

Several weeks more went by. At length the doctor received a letter from the sufferer's residence. It was very closely written, and by the signature he saw that it had been penned by his patient's own hand; from which he concluded that the pain had not returned, for otherwise it would have been very difficult for him to have held a pen.

These are the contents of the letter:—

"Dear Doctor,—I cannot leave either you or medical science in doubt in regard to the mystery of the strange malady which will shortly carry me to the grave.

"I will here tell you the origin of this terrible malady. For the past week it has returned the third time, and I will no longer struggle with it. At this moment I am

only able to write by placing upon the sensitive spot a piece of burning tinder in the form of a poultice. While the tinder is burning I do not feel the other pain; and what distress it causes me is a mere trifle by comparison.

"Six months ago I was still a happy man. I lived on my income without a care. I was on good terms with everybody, and enjoyed all that is of interest to a man of five-and-thirty. I had married a year before—married for love—a young lady, handsome, with a cultivated mind, and a heart as good as any heart could be, who had been a governess in the house of a countess, a neighbour of mine. She was fortuneless, and attached herself to me, not only from gratitude, but still more from real childish affection. Six months passed, during which every day appeared to be happier than the

one which had gone before. If, at times, I was obliged to go to Pesth and quit my own land for a day, my wife had not a moment's rest. She would come two leagues on the way to meet me. If I was detained late, she passed a sleepless night waiting for me; and if by prayers I succeeded in inducing her to go and visit her former mistress, who had not ceased to be extremely fond of her, no power could keep her away from her home for more than half a day; and by her regrets for my absence, she invariably spoiled the good-humour of others. Her tenderness for me went so far as to make her renounce dancing, so as not to be obliged to give her hand to strangers, and nothing more displeased her than gallantries addressed to her. In a word, I had for my wife an innocent girl, who thought of nothing but me, and

who confessed to me her dreams as enormous crimes, if they were not of me.

"I know not what demon one day whispered in my ear: 'Suppose that all this were dissimulation?' Men are mad enough to seek torments in the midst of their greatest happiness.

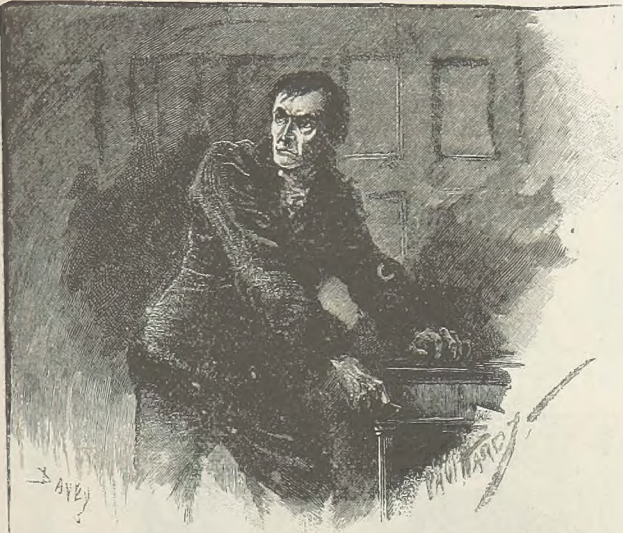
"My wife had a work-table, the drawer of which she carefully locked. I had noticed this several times. She never forgot the key, and never left the drawer open.

"The question haunted my mind: What could she be hiding there? I had become mad. I no longer believed either in the innocence of her face or the purity of her looks, nor in her caresses, nor in her kisses. What if all that were hypocrisy?

"One morning the countess came anew to invite her to her house, and, after much pressing, succeeded in inducing her to go and spend the day with her. Our estates were some leagues from each other, and I



"EVERY DAY APPEARED HAPPIER THAN THE ONE BEFORE IT."



"I FELT LIKE A MAN COMMITTING HIS FIRST CRIME."

promised to join my wife in the course of a few hours. As soon as the carriage had quitted the courtyard, I collected all the keys in the house and tried them on the lock of the little drawer. One of them opened it. I felt like a man committing his first crime. I was a thief about to surprise the secrets of my poor wife. My hands trembled as I carefully pulled out the drawer, and, one by one, turned over the objects within it, so that no derangement of them might betray the fact of a strange hand having disturbed them. My bosom was oppressed; I was almost stifled. Suddenly—under some lace—I put my hand upon a packet of letters. It was as if a flash of lightning had passed through me from my head to my heart. Oh! they were the sort of letters one recognises at a glance—love-letters!

"The packet was tied with a rose-coloured ribbon, edged with silver.

"As I touched that ribbon this thought came into my mind: 'Is it conceivable?—is this the work of an honest man? To steal the secrets of his wife!—secrets belonging to the time when she was a young girl. Have I any right to exact from her a reckoning for thoughts she may have had before she belonged to me? Have I any right to be jealous of a time when I was unknown to her? Who could suspect her of a fault? Who? I am guilty for having suspected her.' The demon again whispered in my ears: 'But what if these letters date from a time when you already had a right to know all her thoughts, when you might already be jealous of her dreams, when she was already yours?' I unfastened the ribbon. Nobody saw me. There was not even a mirror to make me blush for myself. I opened one letter, then another, and I read them to the end.

"Oh, it was a terrible hour for me!

"What was there in these letters? The vilest treason of which a man has ever been the victim. The writer of these letters was one of my intimate friends! And the tone in which they were written!—what passion, what love, certain of being returned! How he spoke of 'keeping the secret'! And all these letters dated at a time when I was married and so happy! How can I tell you what I felt? Imagine the intoxication caused by a mortal poison. I read all those

letters—every one. Then I put them up again in a packet, re-tied them with the ribbon, and, replacing them under the lace, relocked the drawer.

"I knew that if she did not see me by noon she would return in the evening from her visit to the countess—as she did. She descended from the *calèche* hurriedly, to rush towards me as I stood awaiting her on the steps. She kissed me with excessive tenderness, and appeared extremely happy to be once again with me. I allowed nothing of what was passing within me to appear in my face. We conversed, we supped together, and each retired to our bedrooms. I did not close an eye. Broad awake, I counted the hours. When the clock struck the first quarter after midnight, I rose and entered her room. The beautiful fair head was there pressed into the white pillows—as angels are painted in the midst of snowy clouds. What frightful lie of Nature's is vice under an aspect so innocent! I was resolved, with the headlong wilfulness of a madman, haunted by a fixed idea. The poison had completely corroded my soul. I resolved to kill her as she lay.

"I pass over the details of the crime. She died without offering the least resistance, as tranquilly as one goes to sleep. She was never irritated against me—even when I killed her. One single drop of blood fell on the back of my hand—you know where. I did not perceive it until the next day, when it was dry.

"We buried her without anybody suspecting the truth. I lived in solitude. Who could have controlled my actions? She had neither parent nor guardian who could have addressed to me any questions on the subject, and I designedly put off sending the customary invitations to the funeral, so that my friends could not arrive in time.

"On returning from the vault I felt not the least



"SHE KISSED ME WITH EXCESSIVE TENDERNES."

weight upon my conscience. I had been cruel, but she had deserved it. I would not hate her—I would forget her. I scarcely thought of her. Never did a man commit an assassination with less remorse than I.

"The countess, so often mentioned, was at the château when I returned there. My measures had been so well taken that she also had arrived too late for the interment. On seeing me she appeared greatly agitated. Terror, sympathy, sorrow, or I know not what, had put so much into her words that I could not understand what she was saying to console me.

"Was I even listening to her? Had I any need of consolation? I was not sad. At last she took me familiarly by the hand, and, dropping her voice, said that she was obliged to confide a secret to me, and that she relied on my honour as a gentleman not to abuse it. She had given my wife a packet of letters to mind, not having been able to keep them in her own house; and these letters she now requested me to return to her. While she was speaking, I several times felt a shudder run through my frame. With seeming coolness, however, I questioned her as to the contents of the letters. At this interrogation the lady started, and replied, angrily:—

"Sir, your wife has been more generous than you! When she took charge of *my* letters, she did not demand to know what they contained. She even gave me her promise that she would never set eyes on them, and I am convinced that she never read a line of any one of them. She had a noble heart, and would have been ashamed to forfeit the pledge she had given."

"Very well," I replied. "How shall I recognise this packet?"

"It was tied with a rose-coloured ribbon edged with silver."

"I will go and search for it."

"I took my wife's keys, knowing perfectly well where I should find the packet; but I pretended to find it with much difficulty."

"Is this it?" I asked the countess, handing it to her.

"Yes, yes—that is it! See! the knot I myself made has never been touched."

"I dared not raise my eyes to hers; I feared lest she should read in them that I had untied the knot of that packet, and something more."

"I took leave of her abruptly; she sprang into her carriage and drove off."

"The drop of blood had disappeared, the pain was not manifested by any external symptom; and yet the spot marked by the drop burned me as if it had been bitten by a corrosive poison. This pain grows from hour to hour. I sleep sometimes, but I never cease to be

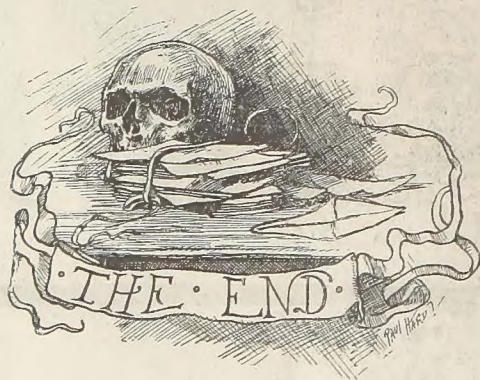
conscious of my suffering. I do not complain to anybody, nobody, indeed, would believe my story. You have seen the violence of my torment, and you know how much the two operations have relieved me; but concurrently with the healing of the wound, the pain returns. It has now attacked me for the third time, and I have no longer strength to resist it. In an hour I shall be dead. One thought consoles me: it is that she has avenged herself here below. She will perhaps forgive me above. I thank you for all you have done for me. May Heaven reward you."



"IS THIS IT?"

A few days later one might have read in the newspapers that S—, one of the richest landowners, had blown out his brains.

Some attributed his suicide to sorrow caused by the death of his wife; others, better informed, to an incurable wound. Those who best knew him said that he had been attacked by monomania; that his incurable wound existed only in his imagination.



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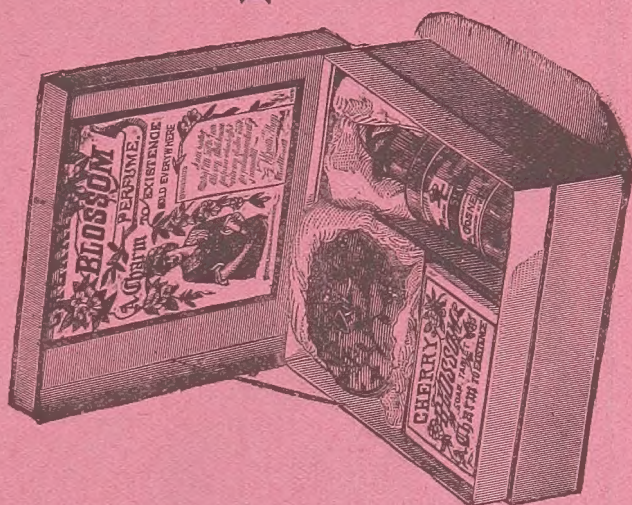
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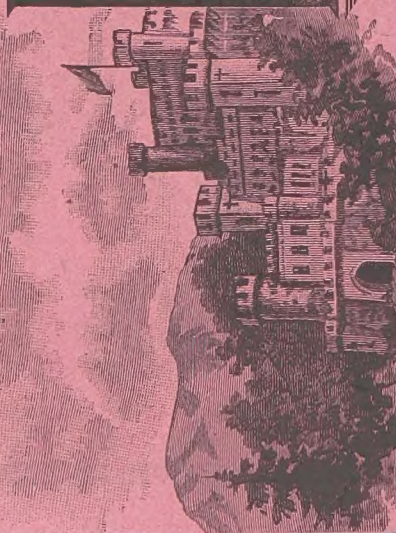
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